

## The economic viewpoint

### Local governments face fiscal dilemmas

By HOWARD J. GROSSMAN

As the noose tightens around the federal budget deficit, the local governments of Pennsylvania face increased obstacles to fiscal health.

The problem has shown up in a number of situations in the state in which a new legislative program has been empaneled to help overcome some of the difficulties brought forth through financial hardships. The problem is compounded by the inability to achieve tax reform in Pennsylvania which, if enacted could accommodate the needs of local governments as well as counties and school districts.

The problems are multiplied as a result of the Commonwealth having more local governments than any other state except Illinois. Local officials in parts of the Commonwealth plead for more state aid, yet it is unlikely that the Commonwealth can provide the resources necessary to balance

local budgets and meet the demands of local citizens who require services. This is why techniques such as joint cooperation in the delivery of municipal services by local governments, councils of government, and other similar techniques make much sense.

While local governments strive to meet financial obligations, the Commonwealth has established the Financially Distressed Municipalities Program (Act 47) to assist communities to regain fiscal health through the use of technical assistance, and in some cases financial aid. Emphasis is placed on long term solutions to municipal financial difficulties which include fiscal management improvements, economic development activities, and the early identification of municipalities with tendencies toward financial distress.

In Pennsylvania several municipalities have determined to be

distressed, with municipal recovery plans adopted and current being implemented, and other forms of financial and managerial technical assistance have been provided to these municipalities.

Those who would like further information pertaining to this program can write the Municipal Program Division, Bureau of Local Governmental Services, 582 Forum Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120 (717 783-4657) or contact the Scranton Regional Office of the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs, 360 State Street, 100 Lackawanna Avenue, Scranton, PA 18503 (717 963-4571).

Put at end of column:

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## A. Case for conservation

### Cars vs. bicycles: Who owns the road?

By ALENE N. CASE

Did you know that one-tenth of all the oil used in the entire world each day is used by American workers simply going to and from their place of employment? If one percent of those drivers left the car in the driveway one day each week, we could save 96 million gallons of gas each year. My husband recently calculated that he saves a whole pint of gas by riding his bicycle two miles to buy his morning newspaper. Multiply that by the number of people in the US who use a car to do short errands and we could probably reduce our dependence on foreign oil to practically zero.

So, why don't more people walk or ride bicycles? Partly, it's habit - we're so accustomed to hopping to the car that we don't even consider any other options. We also think it's quicker. Yes, driving is faster than walking, but you certainly don't burn off as many calories. And, biking can be just as fast as driving. My son can bike to downtown Wilkes-Barre in the same amount of time that he can drive over the same route. In fact, one study showed that people who commuted by bicycle arrived at work on time more often than their car-using colleagues. In some cities such as Los Angeles, the average speed on the freeway is down to 18 miles per hour. At that speed, biking begins to look more attractive!

We could always try to blame the weather. Surely it is too cold or rainy too much of the time around here for the use of alternate transport. But then, how did Seattle WA, Madison WI and Montreal, Quebec become three of the top ten cities in North America for bicycling? (By the way, Orlando FL was listed as one of the three worst in spite of its sunny climate!)

No, our problem is much deeper - it is downright dangerous to walk or bike on most roads and streets in the Wyoming Valley. There are several reasons for this situation. The most obvious problem is a lack of proper education. This applies to learning to be a pedestrian, a biker, or a driver. Drivers should be taught to expect to share the roadway unless it is a limited-access highway where other modes of transportation are forbidden.

One of the quickest ways to make me angry is to honk your horn at me while I wait for a pedestrian to clear the crosswalk before making a turn. Please consider the rights of others and, when in doubt, apply the Golden Rule.

Drivers also seem to think that speed limits were set for their benefit and that if they can go 45mph in a 25mph zone without running into another car or getting caught by the police then it must be OK. With the exception of areas with heavy traffic or dangerous curves, in-town speed limits are set for the safety of non-drivers! Please slow down so that parents can safely push a stroller, children can safely walk to school, and bicycle riders can safely arrive at

their destinations.

If drivers are going to respect the rights of pedestrians and bikers, we must also learn to follow the rules of the road. Children should be taught from infancy that the road is not a place to play. They should always be accompanied by an adult until they can cross the road safely. If children see adults jay-walking, they will tend to do likewise no matter what they have been told. Parents should not let children use their bicycles on the street until those children can follow all the rules of the road consistently. That means stopping at all stop signs, using hand signals to indicate a turn, staying too close to the white lines on the side of the road, looking behind themselves without losing control of the bicycle, etc. It also means teaching them how to get into a line of traffic at a stoplight so that they can turn left or go straight ahead without getting run over by a car. When they can handle all that (usually about 10 or 12), make sure they have proper reflectors and helmets and keep a close eye on them.

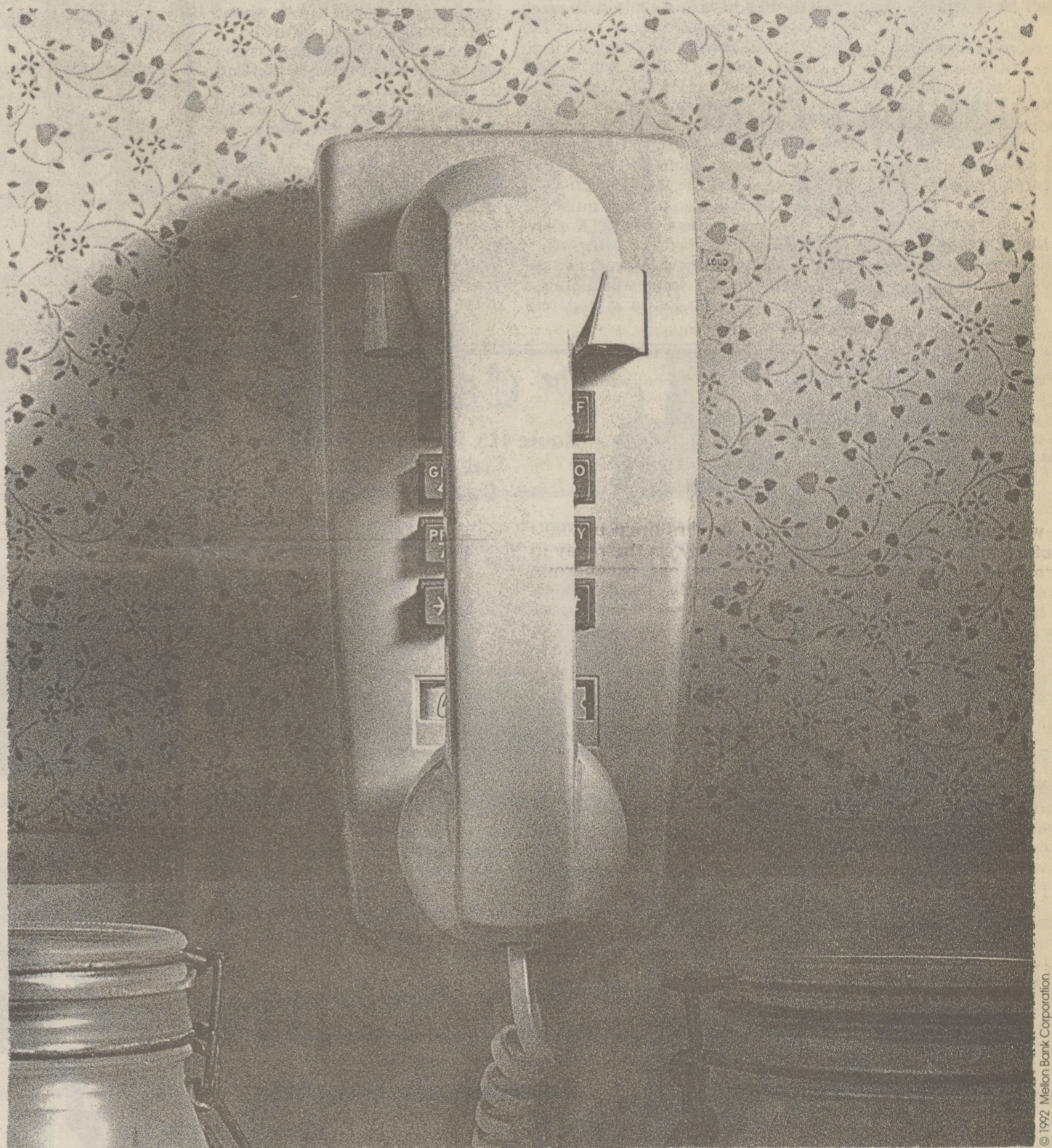
Even if we all enrolled in safety courses tomorrow, our roads would still be dangerous. Engineering is the other half of the equation. It is high time that walkers and bikers were taken into account when streets are built or roads are widened. It seems that the first casualty of road "improvement" is the sidewalk and the second is the shoulder. The next person who designs a street around here should be required to push a baby carriage up Center Street to the Kingston Township Park. Then, I'll bet the plans would suddenly include a sidewalk and/or wide shoulder! (Also, consider the effect of a 2-4 inch drop-off when a road is resurfaced and the shoulder is not included. Try maintaining your balance if you have to get off the road on a bike.)

It is especially important to provide safe areas on bridges for the use of cyclists and pedestrians. Many cities build separate bridges across busy highways specifically for this purpose. Other cities have areas of the downtown closed to vehicular traffic during the day so that shoppers can move about more easily. The shoulders that we do have must be kept clean so that bicycles will not lose traction on the small stones.

There are other ways to encourage biking. One of the simplest is to provide bike racks or lockers at workplaces, schools, grocery stores, and in other parking areas. Some city buses have bike racks on the rear so that one can combine the two modes of transportation. Another option is to provide covered bicycle parking at frequently-used bus stops. No one should have to tie a bike to a phone pole or tree.

There are many other ways to make a neighborhood bicycle and a pedestrian friendly. It is not my intent to catalog them all. I only hope to increase your awareness of the situation so that you can try in some small (or big) way to help solve the problem.

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### Vietnam Veterans Meeting October 7

The Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 539 will hold its regular meeting on October 7. The meeting will be held at the Dallas Legion, Route 415, and will start at 7 p.m. All veterans and interested parties are invited to attend.

### Yacht Club holds family night

The Harveys Lake Yacht Club held its monthly family night program at the clubhouse on Tuesday night. The buffet was planned and provided by various members of the club. Commodore Clinton J. Lehman, MD, presided over the business part of the meeting. Those who attended were privileged to hear the violin debut of Cuong Huynh. Huynh's program included La Cinquante (Gabriel-Marie), Sonata in G (Beethoven), Allegro (Mozart) and Brahms' Hungarian Dance #5. Huynh was accompanied by Joan Williams.